

XVII. Personal Evangelism in Biblical Perspective
iShare—Encounters with Jesus in John's Gospel
“An Encounter with a Woman at a Well”

John 4:1–19

Dr. Harry Reeder

June 17, 2012 – Morning Sermon

We are in our New Testament text in John 4, our encounter with the woman at the well. We will look at John 4:1-19 but I will start off with John 4:1-8 which says [1] *Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John [2] (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), [3] he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. [4] And he had to pass through Samaria. [5] So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. [6] Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. [7] A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” [8] (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We are studying one of those great instruments used in revival and one of those evidences in revival and that is God's people sharing their faith with other people and we're calling that *iShare*. We are committing to personal evangelism. Our verse for this year has been I Thessalonians 2:8 which says [8] *So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.* We share the Gospel and ourselves so that people might hear the redeeming love of Jesus Christ and the gift of salvation that He alone can give and He alone does most surely give. He uses His people to share that with other people so we have had a whole study of how you share, what you share, who shares, when do you share and where do you share.

Then we decided to take a look at some very specific *iShare* moments in the life of Jesus. That's why we went to the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is really interesting. At Briarwood we believe the Bible is God's inspired, inherent Word, what is called verbal plenary inspiration, every word even the order of the words have been given by the Lord. It is absolutely reliable and trustworthy. So not only every word is important but the order is important. I have been overwhelmed going back afresh and anew at how John, by the leading of the Holy Spirit constructs the Gospel of John.

The first couple of chapters of John are devoted to the first week of Jesus' public ministry. Then you have the last week of His ministry that takes up one third of the Gospel of John. It's amazing how much time in that book is spent on the last week of Jesus' ministry but in between that first and last week John takes the time to record personal encounters of Jesus with individuals. So we have been looking at them. There is the wedding feast. There is the encounter at the cleansing of the temple. There is the encounter with the many who believed Jesus to be a miracle worker but not as their Savior. Jesus said at this encounter that He knew the hearts of men and how that played out in the next two encounters. We already looked at one with His encounter with

Nicodemus. Now we are looking at another one with the woman at the well and how He knew what was in their heart (Nicodemus and the woman at the well).

Now having said that, I have also become absolutely convinced that the leading of the Holy Spirit, led John to be very selective in these two encounters that are found in John 3 and John 4 with the contrast in terms of Jesus' evangelism and how His style changed but the message didn't and how His delivery changed but the need was always the same. Nicodemus and the woman at the well had the same problem, same solution but a different style of delivery from Jesus. What is it that we begin to draw out of that, because there is clearly a contrast? There is a man and a woman, one is powerful and one is powerless, one is rich and one is poor, one is admired and one is marginalized. There is clearly a contrast here and I'm convinced you have to look at both of them together.

So I'd like to take a moment to recap what we looked at in the last study. It was the encounter with Nicodemus. He slipped in by night and came with this seeming compliment. He said "You must be sent from God because no one can do these signs, wonders, and miracles unless they have been sent by God." He was rich, a ruler, a Sanhedrin, religious, a Pharisee who was the religious of the religious. He was admired. Nicodemus told Jesus He was a teacher and Jesus reminded him that everyone called him THE teacher of Israel. So here is this man of position, power and prestige. When he comes to Jesus with this compliment Jesus says back to him, "Nicodemus you can't even see the Kingdom of God unless you're born again." Nicodemus said "How is that possible?" Then Jesus says a second time "Nicodemus you can't enter the Kingdom of God unless you're born again."

Jesus is bringing to Nicodemus something that is taught throughout the Bible. We are not sin sick but we're dead. If you are a Christian today you did not get up out of an intensive care sin sick unit, you were in a morgue. You were dead in your sins. You weren't floundering in an ocean about to go down. We were at the bottom of the ocean with a ten million pound rock on us. We were dead in our sins and you can't see or enter the Kingdom of God unless you are born again. So we drew out some things from that.

We drew out the fact that people can't come to Christ unless Jesus draws them and the second thing we realized is that we can't give people new life. I can bring them the Word of Life but I can't save them. They must be born again by the Spirit by the Word of God. That must happen to them. We realized that and so what do we do? We pray because the Holy Spirit moves through the prayers of His people. Secondly, we bring God's Word because they are born again by the living and abiding Word of God and the Spirit of God. Whenever someone becomes a Christian they have two parents. That is the Holy Spirit and the Word of God gave birth to their new heart, new life and their new soul. The third thing we do is we always exalt Jesus.

That's where Jesus brought Nicodemus. Jesus said to him, "Just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness so the Son of Man is to be lifted up." So when we're sharing, while we love our church, our friends, the Christian life we're not lifting up any of that but Jesus. Jesus says "If I be lifted up I'll draw all kinds of men to Myself." Then we found out that when someone comes to new life, they are born again, born from above through regeneration, how do we know that? When babies are first born the parents are listening for one thing and that's the cry of the new baby. What is the cry of the new birth? You know when someone has been born again because they will confess they are

a sinner and they need a Savior. They will confess Jesus alone as their Savior. They will confess that they have surrendered to their Savior. That's the cry of the new birth.

Now we come to the encounter of the woman at the well. Let me remind you that Jesus has been at Bethany by the Jordan. He went up to Cana, then over to Nazareth and then down to Capernaum. Then He went to the Passover at Jerusalem and now He is on His way back from Jerusalem and the passage says "He had to go through Samaria." Really He didn't physically have to go through Samaria, in fact most Jewish people would not have gone through Samaria. Most of those faithful Jewish people in Galilee would go around Samaria to get to Jerusalem. Why? Samaria was the centrality of the location of the ten tribes who had apostatized, left the temple, the throne of David and the Kingdom. Then they had been captured by the Assyrians and intermarried with them. Then they had taken the gods of their Assyrian pagan captors and put those gods along with the God of glory. So any good, self-respected Jewish person would not have gone through Samaria. They would rather have crossed the river Jordan twice than to go through Samaria but the text says that Jesus had to go through Samaria. Why?

Physically He didn't and it would have taken another day but He goes and arrives at a place called Sychar near Shechem. There is Jacob's well that he had given to Joseph. Jacob received the land through Abraham and Isaac. By the time Jesus sits at this well the well has been there 2,000 years. I actually sat at that well and drank the water and got sick. In other words that well has been there 4,000 years now. That's amazing. When Jesus sits beside it this woman comes up at twelve noon. If you read the book of Genesis and other passages it says that the women would go get the water and generally they would get it in the morning for the day and in the evening for the night. Never would they go at high noon. It was too hot and they didn't need to but this woman for some reason went at high noon.

Amazingly there was someone there and normally there wouldn't be anyone there but perhaps that was one of the reasons why she went at that time. As she is getting the water Jesus says to her "I'm thirsty. Give me a drink." He is by Himself because the disciples have gone into town because they are weary from the trip. They are not only thirsty but hungry. They need some supplies so they have gone into Sychar. When Jesus asks the woman for a drink I believe we have our answer as to why Jesus had to go through Samaria. He had a 12 o'clock appointment with a lost woman that He was going to keep. If you're saved He kept the appointment to save you too. So He tells her He wants a drink and she responds to Him in John 4:9 which says [9] *The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)*

She is basically saying there are religious reasons, cultural reasons, gender reasons and all kinds of reasons why this conversation shouldn't be happening. Jesus answers her with two things in John 4:10-12 which says [10] *Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God (living water, salvation from Jesus by grace), and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* [11] *The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"* [12] *Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."*

'Living water' is an interesting phrase. In fact, there are a couple of interesting things in this text. There is an unfortunate translation here. It has to do with the parenthetical sentence in John 4:9 which is (*For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*) This is a tough translation and I know why they chose to word it this way but I don't think it's a good translation. When I give you the more accurate translation you'll understand why they don't use it. The literal translation is "Jews have no table vessel participation with one another." It means you don't share table fellowship and you don't share vessels from the table with one another. Jesus doesn't have a vessel to get a drink of water. He is not only asking the woman for a drink but He is also going to drink the water from her vessel. The Jews had taken the Old Testament call for separation and the Pharisees had brought it to the level that you don't even share a drinking cup with someone who is not walking rightly with the Lord. So she is amazed that He would even ask that.

By the way, when you're sharing the Gospel with someone who doesn't know the Lord one of the best things to do is to ask a question. Another thing to do is to ask them to do something for you. It's communicating dignity to someone. They can't save themselves but communicating dignity to people is what Jesus has done here. So she is asking Him about it. Then, I want to ask, where are the disciples when this is going on? They are in town, Sychar. What are they doing there? They are 'dealing' with the people. They are buying food and I'm sure they didn't pay the asking price. This is talking about table fellowship and table vessels, not dealings.

Then Jesus says to her "You would have asked Me and I would have given you living water." This is a tough translation but it means welling up water. It means springing up water. An illustration from my lifetime has to do when I was at East Carolina but the Aiden Golf Club on the course there was a well. On hole 14 there is an artisan well, the water is just springing up all the time. It is cold because it is coming from way down deep. You just couldn't wait to get to that hole to drink that water and that's the picture here. Jesus says "I'm going to give you something that refreshes you and wells up on its own. I've got a well, not Jacob's well but I Jesus have living water." So let's just finish out the passage here.

John 4:12-15 says [12] *Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.* [13] *Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* [15] *The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."* I don't know whether she is getting what Jesus is saying but I do know that well is 150 feet deep which is 15 stories so it takes some pulling to get water up every time. Perhaps she is thinking she wouldn't have to come back again to get more water but maybe she is getting it. Most of us would have closed the deal right there. She would have joined our church and we would have made her a member.

Jesus says "No" because when you come to Christ you not only come by faith but you also come by repentance, turning from your sins to Christ as your Savior. Jesus knows what is in the heart so now He goes to her heart which is where His water is headed. John 4:16-19 says [16] *Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."* [17] *The woman answered him, "I have no husband."* Jesus said to her, "You are

right in saying, 'I have no husband'; [18] for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." [19] The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

That's comedy right there. You know all of that? You must be a prophet. When she says she doesn't have a husband, Jesus says "Now you have said something true." You've had five and now you've done away with your marriage deal for you have a man now but with sexual immorality you are holding him. She perceives He is a prophet that knows her heart. You and I can't know people's hearts but if we know this text we can know the heart because the heart of the problem is the problem with the heart. What is it that we get from this? I wished we had more time with this text. She goes on to ask Him a question about worship because when you're right with God you get right with worship. One of the great desires is worship. In other words, when the spring of life comes to you it rises up in praise to God. Then she goes to the town and tells everyone (her iShare) and then the whole harvest from the town comes out to Christ. They hear His Word and they believe Him and the sharing is multiplied.

I want to give you three lessons from this text. Let me go back first of all to Nicodemus. I want to give you a takeaway from Nicodemus, a takeaway from the woman and then one from Nicodemus and the woman together. The first takeaway from Nicodemus is no one with whom you share the Gospel can or will come to Christ until or unless they are born again by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. So why do we share with them? First of all it is because the Lord has called you and secondly they need to hear about the Lord. Thirdly, what you are doing is what the Lord uses because when someone is born again they are born again by the Spirit and by the Word. Peter says we are born again by the living and abiding Word of God. You can't control the Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus that the Spirit blows where He wishes. You hear the sound of it and see the effects but you don't know where He came from or where He is going and you can't send Him. But you can hoist the sail for the wind of the Spirit. That is you can open the Word. When you open the Word you exalt Christ and the Holy Spirit always bears witness of Christ. So you and I can engage in the process of what the Holy Spirit uses.

Using Nicodemus and the woman at the well, evangelism is a process. Sometimes you're planting. Sometimes you're watering. Sometimes you're cultivating. Sometimes you're weeding. You are doing all kinds of things in the process. You are in the process. Evangelism is what we do by the power of God. Conversion is what God does alone. So we evangelize and the Lord converts. Only the Lord can bring someone from death unto life, like Nicodemus. Nicodemus was religious but he was lost. Nicodemus was powerful but he was lost. Nicodemus was admired but he was lost. Nicodemus was famous but he was lost. Nicodemus was the religious of the religious, an insider but he was lost. You have to be born again. The woman at the well is lost. Nicodemus and the woman both have something in common. They have to be born again.

The process of reaching them was different. There was a marginalized woman and the arrogance of a religionist. The process was different. To one it was said you have to be born again, to the other it was can I talk to you about some Water? Clearly there is a different style of approach here. There was the same message, same problem but a different style, a different process was being used. It is a process. I don't know

when Nicodemus was converted because he clearly isn't then but three years later he shows up with Joseph of Arimathea confessing Christ. For the woman at the well it doesn't take three years. I don't know whether it was fifteen minutes or thirty minutes but she gets it and then she is in town bringing other people to Christ. That's the way it happens time and time again. Sometimes it's fifteen minutes, fifteen days, fifteen years and we get it in the sharing then look to the Lord to do the conversion and He does it in His own time. We plant, we water and God gives the increase. You are in that process all the time and it's an amazing thing to see all the time.

I would like to use myself as an example. I had a dad and mom who taught me the Word of God and took me to church. My testimony to the students is I was saved out of a drug problem – my dad and mom drug me to church every Sunday morning, evening and Wednesday evening. My dad didn't ask me what church I wanted to go to. He said this one preaches the Bible so you're going. I heard the Bible taught from several different people and went to a Sunday school class and heard the Word. I went to a Youth Group and a Bible study and heard the Word. The Word kept getting planted and planted and I walked away in profanity, immorality, violence, vulgarity and absolute rebellion against God with that Word always planted. It wouldn't let me go. Then at 21 years of age I came to Christ. Yet I had the glorious privilege of sitting down with someone who went through a pastor's class and prayed with them that there would not be a day that went by that they didn't know Jesus. That's a glorious testimony.

This is a glorious moment in the lives of believers when there is a process engaged where we can't get them a new heart but we can bring them the Word and exalt Christ so that the unconverted can be brought from death unto life by the power of the Spirit. We can be a part of the process. Look at the patience and humility that gives you because you're dealing people who are not coming to Christ and then you realize the only reason you came to Christ is because the Spirit of God gave me eyes to see and ears to hear. It's not the arrogance of a religionist – I got better why didn't you? What do you do when you prod a corpse? Nothing for you were brought from death unto life. You were born again and that gives you patience with others. It gives you humility by the sovereign grace of God. It gives you boldness because you know God uses His Word and it gives you assurance because when God begins a work He'll always finish it.

The second takeaway comes from the woman at the well. It is personal evangelism is to thoughtfully overcome any and all barriers. Where is the person? You do one way with Nicodemus and another way with the woman at the well. It was the same message and the same problem but there is a difference in style because you're prayerfully and thoughtfully considering where they are. You are absolutely committed to overcoming any and all barriers to get them to Christ and to bring Christ to them. You can plead with them and be passionate. You can't convert them but you can lay your heart before them. You can pour yourself out. You can persuade and look to the Lord to use what you've done and go beyond what you do into their life but one thing you're committed to is you will not discriminate in the sharing of the Gospel. Everyone needs Him. Only the Gospel can save them and I've been called to take the Gospel to everyone.

There was a person from this congregation who went out to pastor a church and all of a sudden he heard one of his people saying "Who let those people in? They are not our kind." I was praying with a young pastor in my office this week that pastors a church

that is dying. Four families came and that was much when you only had four families to start with. The church doubled and then there were two more families who came who were a different color. Then there was a session meeting and the pastor was told “You were doing a good job but those people don’t belong here.” What an abomination before God! We share the Gospel with anyone and everyone. When you are sharing with a religionist like a Pharisee or a marginalized woman and you know why she is coming at twelve noon, it was because the other women saw her as a pariah, but Jesus goes after the religionist, the arrogant, the marginalized, men, women and every single barrier that could come up because everyone needs to hear this Gospel message.

I have no ability to control the outcome for that is between them and the Lord but I do have the call to take the Gospel to every single to person with no discrimination. There is no gender barrier, no social barrier, no moral barrier, no religious barrier or racial barrier. We take the Gospel to anyone and everyone, just as someone brought it to us. You may be thinking “isn’t there a church for our kind?” Yes and let me tell you who our kind are. They are sinners saved by grace. There are old ones, young ones, rich ones, poor ones, black ones, white ones, male, female. They are sinners saved by grace. So we take the Gospel everywhere.

Finally, the third takeaway is no one seeks for God unless and until God seeks them. Yet all do seek for what only God can provide while fleeing God to pursue the emptiness of idolatry. There is the empty idolatry of religion, sexual immorality etc. because the root of every sin is idolatry. Calvin said “The heart is an idolatry factory maker.” It takes the good things of God like children and marriage, amoral things, moral things and sexual perversion, promiscuity etc. The heart can manufacture idols continually and constantly. That’s why you want to come to Jesus because He not only gives you a new record but He gives you a new heart. He doesn’t patch up your heart. He gives you a new heart when you’re born again.

We might think that a person is seeking the Lord but they’re not. Romans 3 is very clear when it says there is none who seek Him, no not one but He does draw non seekers to Himself. He does use His people to seek and to save the lost. If someone is seeking the Lord then you know that is someone that God is working in and everyone you look to is looking outside themselves for salvation but they are looking anywhere and everywhere but to the Lord. They go to the vain idols – it’s the next business, the next house, the next purchase, the next whatever. There is always something that they are moving for.

You know two things. One Jesus alone satisfies and two the idols are always empty. They will get temporary satisfaction. Can I use the water? There is some temporary satisfaction from Jacob’s well, right? But you are back the next day and that is the way it is with idolatry. I succeeded. I got the deal. I got the business, the house, the car, the clothes, the award and there will be that momentary rush but then all of a sudden it’s “is that all there is?” We are back looking for another well. Nicodemus had gone to the well of religion time and time again. The woman had gone to the well of men. I need a man. She found out that man didn’t work so she needed another man. She went back to that well five times. Now she doesn’t go back to that well but just says I’ll get a man let him make my body his playground because maybe I can get my salvation that way. So she kept going to the well of idolatry. It was the idolatry and where she thought her life would come.

Whether it's an inside like Nicodemus or an outsider like the woman at the well or someone powerful or powerless or someone religious or irreligious or someone admired or marginalized they need the Lord because we are all guilty of idolatry and it's empty and cannot satisfy your soul. But there is a Fountain and it is Jesus. He is a victorious Warrior and Lord of everything. When you drink of Him He will satisfy, why? To the woman He said "I'm thirsty, give Me a drink. Come to Me for I have a well and water where you'll never thirst again" why? It was because three years later He would be on a cross. To the women that were standing there they hear the words one more time "I thirst" as His very soul is evaporated under the judgment of God to fill up a well and an unfathomable cup of life for you and me. His thirst brought Him to the woman to tell her about the well so that she could have life. His thirst on the cross filled up the well so that you can have life forevermore, the Living Water of Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father that You have so freely and gloriously done that work in the lives of men and women such as ourselves. Dear friend, if the Lord has raised you up from a spiritual cemetery and brought you to drink of Christ just give Him praise from your heart right now. If today you came seeking for that which only the Lord can provide, please hear me. Money, power, prestige, marriage, men, women, sex, none of them can forgive you, accept you, cleanse you, empower you, change you or save you but there is a Fountain. Come to Christ who is our life. Jesus, I surrender. Father, we will give You the praise and glory for all that You do in the lives of Your people. Salvation is not only from the Lord. Our salvation is the Lord, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.